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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 005136

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [KU](#) [FREEDOM](#) [AGENDA](#)
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY
SUBJECT: FREEDOM AGENDA: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY POSTPONES
DISCUSSION ON ELECTORAL REFORM UNTIL JUNE 2006

REF: A. KUWAIT 5016
[1](#)B. KUWAIT 4740
[1](#)C. KUWAIT 4406

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The National Assembly voted on December 12 in favor of postponing discussion on proposals to reduce the number of electoral constituencies, a key political reform, until June 30, 2006. The vote comes amid heated public debate over the issue, and after the Government came out publicly in support of a reduction from the current 25 constituencies to 10 (septel). Parliamentarians supporting the reduction see the postponement as proof the Government "is not serious about political reform," arguing that with its 16 ministers the Government could easily muster enough support to pass any reduction proposal, although there is a vocal opposition even among some MPs who normally support GOK proposals. Deputy National Assembly Speaker Meshari Al-Anjari told Poloff on December 14 that it was highly unlikely the issue would be addressed seriously before the 2007 parliamentary elections. End summary.

Discussion on Electoral Constituencies Postponed Yet Again

[1](#)2. (SBU) During the National Assembly's December 12 session, 32 out of the 59 MPs present voted to postpone discussion on proposals to reduce the number of electoral constituencies until June 30, 2006. (Note: There are 66 voting members of the National Assembly: 50 popularly elected representatives and 16 government ministers who are appointed by the Prime Minister and approved by the Amir. The current parliamentary term ends in July 2006. End note.) The Interior and Defense Affairs Committee, whose five members are all pro-government MPs, requested the six-month postponement after it again failed to meet the deadline for submitting a report on the issue. The English-daily Kuwait Times reported December 3 that the committee had "failed to hold a single meeting" to draft the report. The Government submitted a separate request for a two-month postponement. Members voted on the postponement by a show of hands; no record was taken of who voted for or against the request, though liberal, independent MP Mohammed Jassem Al-Sager claimed ten ministers voted for the six-month delay.

[1](#)3. (C) The vote comes amidst heated public debate over the issue, which is seen by supporters as a key political reform and a precursor to official Government recognition of political parties. (Note: While not legally banned, political parties are not officially recognized by the Government. End note.) The Government recently stated publicly its support for ten constituencies, though many observers question the Government's sincerity in backing the reform (septel). Discussion on the reform was similarly

postponed during the 2004-2005 parliamentary session after the Government submitted two separate reduction proposals, a move some commentators argued, and National Assembly Speaker Jassem Al-Khorafi suggested, was intended "to confuse the Assembly" (ref C).

Pro-Reform MPs Claim Government Not Serious About Reform

14. (C) MPs supporting the reform reacted strongly to the postponement. Deputy National Assembly Speaker Meshari Al-Anjari, who supports a reduction to five constituencies, told Poloff on December 14 that the vote was a Government "tactic," which "indicated (it) is not serious about implementing political reform." He argued the Government could easily pass any reduction proposal if it was serious about reform. Saying his comments were "strictly between us," he specifically blamed Minister of Energy Ahmed Al-Fahd Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah and Deputy Prime Minister Mohammed Dhaifallah Sharar for the postponement. Al-Anjari said Shaykh Fahd told him privately "not to expect any changes (in the electoral system) before 2011." Al-Anjari predicted the issue would not be addressed before the 2007 parliamentary elections.

15. (SBU) Other MPs expressed similar opinions. Liberal, independent MP Mohammed Jassem Al-Sager said "the outcome of the vote demonstrated the Government's true position" on the issue. Independent MP Mohammed Al-Mutair accused the Government of intentionally seeking to delay discussion on the reform until the 2007-2008 parliamentary term. He claimed the vote revealed the Government's insincere support for the reduction.

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16. (C) Shi,a MP Hassan Jowhar told Poloff on December 11 before the postponement vote that the Government was not only against the reform, but was actively working to prevent its passage. This view was echoed by MPs attending a December 11 meeting in support of the reform. Islamist MP Abdullah Akkash argued that the Government's inconsistency on the issue proved it did not want the reform. Conservative, independent MP Marzouk Al-Habini claimed the Government could pass the reform "in a few hours if they wanted to," but did not because the reduction would decrease its influence in the National Assembly. (Comment: Some MPs who do not want to be seen as opposing this reform may well be quietly relieved that the system that got them elected remains intact. End comment.)

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